

I wonder if prayer visibly sustains your life, family and ministry. Or to put it another way, I wonder if prayer is the visible power that constantly calls down the power of God in your life, your family and your ministry. Is prayer central or is it peripheral in your life?

The reason prayer is essential to your Christian life, family and ministry is that you exist and your family exists and your ministry exists to do the humanly impossible. We are called to magnify Christ, being supremely satisfied in Christ in our life and death, experiencing the unity of love in the cause of the gospel, being fearless before our adversaries, being humble and counting others more important than ourselves. To live in this surrender to Christ and obedience to Christ is humanly impossible.

God has established prayer as the means by which we receive His supernatural help. Without supernatural help, we cannot live a life worthy of the gospel. Everything that distinguishes Christians from the world in a Christ-exalting way of life is a work of God's supernatural grace. God has ordained that His grace flow to us through prayer. Prayer must be central, not peripheral to our lives.

### **Visible Prayer Displays Dependence on God**

Prayer should be the visible power of a Christian's life, not just a private act that nobody in the family or the ministry knows is happening. I say this because the New Testament makes prayer a public act as well as a private one and because visible prayer is a statement of our helplessness and our utter dependence on God

for the outcomes of life and family and ministry. God is glorified when it is plain to people that we consider Him a trustworthy Father who is eager to hear our prayers. He is glorified when Christians humble themselves openly as people who are not ashamed to beg for God's help.

If prayer is not the visible power of our life, we are communicating to people and to the world that what we do, not what God does, but it is what we do that is decisive. We may not believe that but we are communicating exactly this when prayer is not visibly woven into the fabric of our lives, family and ministry.

I want to consider the visibility of prayer in Paul's letter to the Philippians. He cannot complete his greeting before he is praying, not writing about prayer, but actually praying in writing. Please open your Bibles to Philippians chapter 1, verse 1, where I will begin my reading. "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

<sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

<sup>3</sup> "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, <sup>4</sup> always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now."

Before Paul finished with his first sentence, he is publicly, not privately, praying a blessing of grace and peace down on the saints of Christ. Think about the words in verse 2, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." What kind of speech is this? On the one hand, he is clearly speaking to the brethren in Philippi, "Grace to you." Paul speaks in the second person plural. He does not say, "Grace to me or grace to them," but "Grace to you."

Let me ask, what verb would you add? Grace and peace **be** to you? Grace and

peace **come** to you? Grace and peace **fill** you? Grace and peace **bless** you, **guide** you, **comfort** you or **protect** you? Would we exclude any of these verbs? No, I think not. I believe Paul's intention is to say, may grace and peace of God do for you and be for you all that grace and peace can do and be for you, absolutely all of it because it comes from God.

However, whatever verb we add, we need to understand that Paul intends for the brethren to experience this grace and peace because he is speaking these words. These are not throwaway words, they are words given and inspired by God the Holy Spirit. These are words that are meant to communicate and instill grace and peace to the Philippians' hearts. How does the grace and peace come?

We find the answer in verse 2, Paul does not give grace and peace, but **"Grace to you and peace comes from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."** Paul is not thinking merely of the relationship here between himself and the Philippians. The reason is because he knows he is not the ultimate source of grace and peace; God is. Paul's mind is first towards God and then towards the brethren. He is aware that if his words are to awaken the experience of grace and peace, it will be because God has heard his words of prayer and made them the channel of His grace and peace.

These words are both a blessing to the brethren and a prayer of dependence to God and these words are public and visible. They show Paul's dependence on God and on prayer to facilitate grace and peace.

In verse 3 Paul continues his prayer, **"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, <sup>4</sup>always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy."** Paul prays though his letter publicly and he is saying he prays for them often. The question this raises is how does this fit with what Jesus said as recorded in Matthew? Jesus

said, “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup> But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:5–6) Jesus was warning, do not deceive yourselves by using prayer publicly to impress others with your spirituality. If you do that, it will be plain that you are not praying to get God’s help but you are praying to get man’s praise. You may get man’s praise, but that is all you will get.

Jesus was not saying that the only place you can pray is in your closet where nobody knows you are praying. The issue was not whether prayer was made in public but whether prayer was motivated by vanity, made for the love of man’s praise.

Paul was not disobeying Jesus here in Philippians by making his prayer public. He was sharing the joy he had in calling down God’s greatest blessings on the Philippians, and he was overflowing with thankfulness for the truth of God for the Philippians. Move ahead with me in Philippians to chapter 4, verse 19, “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” Paul makes his prayer public showing his love of the brethren and showing God’s glorious readiness to meet their needs according to His riches, for God does what no human can do.

### **Visible Prayer Glorifies God**

In Philippians 1, verses 9 to 11 Paul is praying for their joy and that their “love may abound more and more, but John goes beyond. Paul continues, “It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,

<sup>10</sup> so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” Paul’s desire and goal is for Christians to live righteously through Christ to the glory and praise of God!

Paul weaves prayer publicly into the ministry of this letter. He wants everyone to know that he prays for the Philippians and what he prays. He prays for abounding love. He prays for discernment in the tough choices that love must make. He prays that they will arrive blameless at the “day of Christ.” He prays that they will be overflowing with righteous deeds.

Paul makes plain that the reason he prays for this, the reason he asks God to do these things is because it is that these things can only come “through Jesus Christ” in verse 11, so we understand these things are supernatural. If they do not come through Jesus, they do not come at all. This is why Paul prays. In making his prayer public, Paul displays his total dependency upon Christ demonstrating to all listening that God is a glorious hearing God. God receives glory through their love, blamelessness, discernment, and their righteous deeds because these come “through Jesus Christ” in answer to prayer.

Making prayer a visible part of his ministry is Paul’s way of calling attention to the glorious bounty of God’s overflowing grace. Visible prayer is at the heart of how God gets glory in our lives and ministry.

### **Visible Prayer Sustains Faith**

In Philippians 1:19 Paul declares, it is your prayers for me that will make the difference. Paul says, “I will rejoice, <sup>19</sup> for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.” It amazes me

that Paul states throughout his writings that it is the prayers of ordinary believers, like you and me, which is the means by which he expects his apostolic ministry to succeed. That's amazing! I believe this is true for me as well; it is your prayers that help bring wisdom and guidance as I seek God and work on the sermons for each Sunday. I join Paul as he says to the brethren, "I am depending on your prayers for the outcome of my imprisonment" and he declares this publicly. So, whether it is his prayers for them, or their prayers for him, Paul is visibly weaving a manifest dependence on God through prayer into the ministry of this letter.

### **Visible Prayer Cultivates Peace**

Please move again in Philippians to chapter 4 where Paul exhorts the brethren of Philippi to pray and he relates it to a foundational teaching of his letter. Reading beginning at verse 6, "The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:5–7) In one sense, this command to pray is all encompassing and in another sense, it is very focused. It is all encompassing because of the words "in everything." Verse 6, "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." The words "in everything" are all encompassing; pray about everything in your life. However, in another sense, this command is very narrow and focused. Paul doesn't refer to one hundred things you may get in answer to prayer; he refers to freedom from anxiety and the presence of peace. These are the consequence of all-encompassing prayer; one loses their anxiety and gains peace in their soul.

With this in mind let me read verses 6 and 7 again, "Do not be anxious about

anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” So negatively, the aim of all these prayers, praying about everything, is to get rid of all anxiety and then positively you replace anxiety with the peace of God. This is really remarkable. Paul’s concern here is focused primarily on a state of mind and heart that is free from anxiety or fear and is filled with peace or contentment. Why is this Paul’s focus?

### **Visible Prayer Exalts Christ**

When you step back and think about Paul’s main burden in this letter, the reason for his focus becomes clear. Paul’s great burden is that Jesus Christ be magnified and that the worth of the gospel be publicly vindicated by the example of the Christ-centered life being lived out by his followers. Paul expectation for himself is found in verse 20, “as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.” Paul fully expects the Philippians to live in the same manner. Reading verse 27, “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.” My beloved let us live our lives in a state of prayer and praise, in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. How is this accomplished? Verse 28 calls for us to live lives “not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.”

The way Christ would be magnified in life was that the Philippians would walk

worthy of the gospel, as we walk in the gospel. Verse 27, “Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.” My beloved, we are to live to show the supreme worth of the gospel and of Jesus Christ. How does that happen? It happens through lives of fearlessness and unity in love for the sake of the gospel. Listen to verses 27 and 28, “...I may hear...that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel<sup>28</sup> and not frightened in anything by your opponents.” How do we stand firm and not frightened? Through the preaching of the God’s Word we are brought into unity of our mind and through visible public prayer God melds into us the heart of fearless unity and peace. Paul speaking of the message of our lives to the world, “This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.” Supernatural, Christ-exalting fearlessness is the key to glorifying Christ in this world.

Christ-exalting fearlessness in the face of danger is not natural, but supernatural. Fearless peace is the key to glorifying Christ in the world. Therefore, we must pray. If we pray in our prayer closet alone, which is a good thing, but when we pray alone Christ will not be magnified in our fearlessness. However, when we pray visibly it requires we be fearless about our need for Christ and when we step out in faith Christ replaces fear with peace and we begin to pray in every circumstance for His help. People see and Christ is glorified when we are fearless and at the same time possess His deep peace.

I will close the message with prayer, visible prayer, and then we will break into a couple of groups and pray together for unity, for peace, for love and to be fearless before the world.

Closing Prayer